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ABSTRACT

This report is based mainly on two studies that sought to describe the prevalence and extent of student support services in further education (FE) colleges in England. Information for the studies was gathered from a 1991-92 survey of 80 colleges and 5 regional workshops on the development of learner services in FE colleges. Additional insights were obtained from 13 colleges that reported on their learner services arrangements in June 1992. Some of the key findings of the studies were the following: (1) 80 percent of colleges intend to expand their learner services; (2) 40 percent of colleges organize learner support services mainly through central units; (3) about 1 in 5 colleges relied mainly on lecturers to provide learner support services; (4) interchangeable roles between lecturing and support staff are becoming common; (5) colleges had difficulty in deciding the extent of learner support staffing; (6) improving reception facilities and overseas student support emerged as top priorities for future development; (7) 40 percent of colleges derived quality control measures from their learner support services; and (8) widespread attempts were made to obtain the views of learners and staff. The studies concluded that these emerging development issues with regard to learner support services will play a role in future development of lifelong education and merit further study. (Contains 19 references.) (KC)

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LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN FURTHER EDUCATION

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A *commentary on current developments*

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LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN FURTHER EDUCATION

A commentary on current developments

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RP673

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FOREWORD

The emergence of the 'invisible world' of student services to centre stage in many colleges is one of the most striking developments of recent years. Explanations for the expanding range of these services are varied. Some services can be regarded as part of a marketing or participation strategy; others can be seen as part of a more general institutional response to curriculum change. Management thinking too has been influenced by the need for colleges to be more 'responsive' and 'flexible'.

In retrospect, however, these developments can also be seen as part of the general trend to improve college services as a whole.This reflects the growing 'corporate ethos' of colleges as they seek or are given greater control of their own affairs. It should be expected that this interest will continue as services which were once provided or funded by others (LEAs, HMI, DFE, etc.) are reduced or withdrawn.

Incorporation has thus added new dimensions to the ferment of thinking which was already underway on the nature and purpose of college support services.Consequently what began initially as an enquiry into student services has shifted considerably. For that we would like to thank all the colleges who shared their thinking with us. We hope that their participation has enabled us to provide an accurate scan of key development issues together with a relevant and useful commentary.

Paul Kneafsey
Development Officer
Further Education Unit

BACKGROUND

This report is based mainly on the work of two recent FEU projects: **The Development of Learner Support Services in Further Education Colleges** (RP673) and **Key Curriculum Developments — Curriculum Change and Learner Support Services Theme** (RP694).

The findings of RP673 were based on a 1991-2 survey of 80 colleges and five regional workshops on the development of learner services in colleges of further education (FE). Additional insights were obtained from the 13 colleges which reported on their learner services arrangements in June 1992 as part of their involvement in RP694. Rather than giving a detailed and complete picture of learner support services in FE this report seeks to identify emerging development issues with particular regard to the organisation and staffing of learner services and the impact of these services on the FE curriculum offer and overall quality of provision.

This report is also intended as a discussion paper for generating commentary and on-going dialogue on the development of college services in general.

KEY POINTS

This summary covers the main findings

SURVEY FINDING	COMMENTS
80% of colleges intend to expand their learner services	Although learner support services seem to be generally regarded as a 'good thing' there were difficulties in establishing a convincing rationale for this expansion.Those colleges which did so by, for example, linking support services to other strategic goals, such as participation growth or quality objectives, are likely to be in a better position to sustain their development plan.
70% of colleges had written statements about learner support services	Nevertheless within colleges there are many conflicting views about the role of these services. It is important to reconcile these so that a shared understanding can emerge. College managers themselves need to be clear about the place of learner support services within their institutions.
40% of colleges organise learner support services mainly through central units	The welter of organisational changes taking place should not obscure the need for support services to be coherent and convenient from the *learners'* perspective.
28% of colleges organised learner support services as a range of individual services	Although the level of individual expertise was high, specialist staff often felt isolated and the co-ordination of services presented difficulties.
About one in five colleges relied mainly on lecturers to provide learner support services	The advantages of strengthened teacher/learner links were often offset by the uneven extent of support and the lack of specialist staff.
8% of colleges used external specialists as the main providers of support services	Cost effective but limited in scope and unable to provide a comprehensive service.
Interchangeable roles between 'lecturing' and 'support' staff becoming a common feature	Two main concerns were evident here. Firstly, the enhanced role of non-teaching staff in supporting learners is introducing a new professional cadre for whom suitable training occupational standards will be required.Secondly, how to prepare teaching staff for new roles, e.g. managers of learning, co-ordinators of support, etc.
Colleges had difficulty in deciding the extent of learner support staffing	Most of these difficulties arose because of differing definitions of learner services and the extent to which these were embedded in the lecturers' job description or were available centrally.

SUMMARY CHART

of the survey and provides a brief commentary.

SURVEY FINDING	COMMENTS
An expanding range of 'corporate' services to support learners	New alignments are emerging linking learner support services to college administration or marketing. Such clusters of activities (often described as customer or student services) can play a significant role in improving the overall climate for learning.
Improving reception facilities and overseas student support emerged as top priorities for future development	Identifying services which support the **learner** as distinct from those which support **learning** appears helpful in devising suitable organisational and staffing arrangements.
Increase in centrally provided curriculum support	Managing the interface between central units and teaching departments in ways which establish **co-operative** working relationships is essential if learners are to obtain the full benefit of central curriculum support.
Improvements in threshold services such as initial advice and assessment (including the Assessment of Prior Learning) and helping progression (ROA, action planning, etc.) were the most frequently mentioned development areas of curriculum support	Interest in identifying 'common' activities is leading to an expansion of learning support and the formation of learning units which bring together library, resource-based learning (RBL) and information technology (IT) facilities.
Existing monitoring, review and evaluation (MRE) were generally not applied	Traditionally most college MRE arrangements were designed either to monitor WRFE or were course based.
Extensive use of formal reports and surveys	These played a major role in providing managers with information for resource allocation.
Widespread attempts to obtain the views of learners and staff	Surveys were usually carried out in the absence of quality standards although a number of colleges were beginning to develop and apply these.
50% of colleges obtained data for MIS from learner support services	There is ample scope for improving links between college MIS and the increasing volume of information held by the various learner support services.
About 70% of colleges thought that their learner support services provided customer feedback opportunities and acted as advocates for learners	The survey did not indicate the extent to which colleges used feedback to inform planning decisions.
40% of colleges derived quality control measures from their learner support services. Monitoring equal opportunities was a frequent example of this	External influences such as the Citizens Charter had influenced thinking to some extent.

1. INTRODUCTION

This work began as a survey into the development of student services. However, it soon became apparent that there was no agreed nomenclature which fully covered the range of activities that colleges were developing. What some colleges described as student services, others described variously as client, user, customer or learner support services. Therefore in this report the term 'learner support services' is used because in today's college a minority of enrolments are full-time students; other 'students' may have employee or trainee status and some may be employers, self-employed or unemployed. It is also used to reflect the fact that supporting learners is a key service in terms of the quality of the college offer as a whole.

However even this term presents difficulties for many colleges found it useful to make a distinction between those services which support the learner (crèche facilities, accommodation services, etc.) and those which support learning (Records of Achievement, vocational guidance, etc.). Hence learner support arrangements were often influenced by participation or marketing strategies whereas learning support measures were more influenced by curriculum issues such as the development of core skills or the introduction of ROA.

Regardless of the difficulties of definition however, it is clear that the range of support services is wide and looks likely to expand. More than 80% of the colleges in the RP673 survey, for instance, indicated their intention to enlarge their learner support services.Thus an *ad hoc* range of services, often staffed in the past by a shadowy collection of individuals frequently estranged from the academic establishment, is now in the words of one prominent principal 'deserving of resource priority even at a time of financial constraint'.[1]

The shift of opinion in favour of learner/student services reflects the trend away from department-centred institutions, which for all their strengths, meant that educational decisions within an institution were often made in a segmented or unco-ordinated way. Numerous external influences such as non-advanced further education planning, European Social Fund funding and the Technical and Vocational Education extension have required institutions to develop a more collective approach to a range of issues. At the same time the large increase in participation rates together with the introduction of a more flexible provision have inevitably led colleges to examine again the nature of their support services. Coping with an extra million learners over the next decade (two thirds of whom will be adults), while maintaining the quality of the service, should ensure that this examination will be an on-going exercise.

The trend towards resourcing learning and the learner rather than teaching will require an efficient range of services whose effectiveness should be measured by their capacity to support the following:

- the movement towards lifelong learning/careership;
- the encouragement of self development and higher achievement;
- curriculum changes such as the development of core skills
- new assessment methods which encourage participation and higher achievement;
- the growth of individual learning programmes;
- the greater variety and flexibility of learning modes;
- the transfer/progression between FE, HE and company-based vocational education and training (VET);
- the interface between school, college, employers and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs);
- ROAs, action planning, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT);
- the expansion of modular programmes;
- equitable participation patterns.

Establishing cost-effective learner support services is therefore likely to be at the centre of institutional development for some time to come and being so may bring about some fairly fundamental changes in the design and staffing of FE colleges.

2 INSTITUTIONAL ETHOS AND LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

Typically, in the past, learner support services were organised on an *ad hoc* basis, were often 'invisible' in the sense that they had no organisational form and hence often lay outside the main college culture. However, with the developments of the past few years the location and ethics of these services have been reviewed by many colleges and now find expression in a variety of mission statements and organisational arrangements.

Philosophy and ethics of learner support services

The RP673 survey looked at the extent to which colleges were developing policies for their learner support services.

SURVEY FINDING

Most of the survey colleges now have some form of written statement on learner (student) support.Seventy per cent said that references to learner (student) support services were included in their mission statement or strategic plans.

Commentary

Examples of these include 'increasing participation through enhanced learner support', 'developing a service infrastructure which would allow teaching departments to concentrate on the delivery of learning programmes' and 'making the threads of learner support clearly visible and fully integrated into the colleges' curriculum development plan'.

Balancing the interests of the learner, the institution and funding sources (FEFC, TECs, employers, etc.) produces inevitable strains and the outcome will not always be equitable. There is a need, therefore, to set out principles and purposes which assert equity and impartiality, and to generate a debate on the ethics and mission of learner services. Within colleges this debate is already under way and seems to revolve around following the four main approaches, briefly described below.

'Student welfare' ethos

College mission statements often contain a commitment to providing a 'caring environment' which to some extent reflects one of the traditional aims of student services. Essentially this approach supports the learner by providing a safety net to help students with problems. Typical key activities would be counselling and tutoring regimes which provided some pastoral care and help or advice on transport, accommodation, health care and other welfare issues. Investment in crèches and canteen facilities and the promotion of college social and cultural activities would appear high on the agenda in this perspective.

Some critics of the 'welfare student' ethos warn of the dangers of encouraging a 'dependency culture' which does little to prepare learners for the harsher or more indifferent climate of employment or higher education (although there are now indications of an expansion of student services in HE). Others are concerned that there may be an inbuilt tendency to raise expectations or to seek to extend the range of services beyond the resource capabilities of the institution.

'Customer' or 'client' services approach

A number of colleges regard student services as an integral part of customer or client services. Thus the dominant philosophy is often a marketing one which locates learner services development within the college participation strategies or as an aspect of college image and promotion. Key activities in this approach are the provision of efficient admissions and information services and effective schools/employer liaison. Publicity and marketing are seen as closely related complementary activities. Investment tends to be concentrated on the provision of outreach and threshold services such as better car parking or improved reception and enrolment arrangements. Much stress is laid on the identification of needs through client-based surveys and one college stated that responding to these was a key organisational principle for the college. This is a good defence against an over-zealous marketing approach which may lead to exaggerated promotional claims about the college offer. Colleges which regularly seek the views of their 'customers' or 'clients' and incorporate these into planning decisions are in a better position to avoid over statements which could even lead to litigation.

Supporting the independent learner

Under the influence of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and other curriculum entitlement policies some colleges stress the enabling and facilitating role of learner services in supporting learning. Consequently the provision of information and advisory services linked to resource-based learning opportunities is key. There is increased reliance on more carefully planned induction and the provision of learning support such as study skills.

Learners are encouraged to take more responsibility for their action planning, ROAs and for exercising their curriculum entitlement. Investment in learning workshops and IT networks are regarded as priorities and management of library services and tutor support are often seen as part of learner support services. But placing the onus on the learner to time manage their own programmes is not without risk. Some colleges which have followed this route have noted uneven take-up of curriculum entitlements and others have expressed concern about the danger of increasing non-completion rates or lower achievement.

This has led some colleges to look at mainstreaming learning support which one college defined as the foundation for learning to take place, i.e. literacy, numeracy, language and mathematical skills, learning to learn, study and research skills. In many colleges much of this type of learning support and practitioner expertise has its origins in special needs or adult basic skills units. Extending such patterns of learner support across the college has major resource implications given its labour intensive traditions, which were often supported in the past by favourable weightings.

Supporting achievement and success

This approach is beginning to appear in a number of colleges.In part it reflects an attempt to break with the traditional belief, often held by staff and students alike, that learner support services exist mainly to support problem students or students with learning difficulties. Attracting successful learners, helping people to accelerate their learning or achieve beyond expectations become important aspects of this type of learner services. Supporting achievement also reflects the growing interest of colleges in the 'learner-gain', 'distance-travelled' approach.

Typically such a college might have a mission statement asserting that individuals have a right to reach the highest possible standards of personal achievement. Measuring this achievement means determining starting and finishing points more accurately, and so investment in initial diagnostic assessment, APL and enhanced exit guidance becomes important. Guidance-supported admissions, effective careers advice and the development of ROAs as a key transfer document are other important elements in this approach. There is also a belief that potentially such developments have a self-funding dynamic in that fast-track achievers could release time for under-prepared learners to work at their own pace. However, investment in these areas is inhibited by the lack of recognition of 'distance travelled' in funding formula to date.

Conclusion

All these approaches (and others) are likely to exist to some extent in most colleges. Some will be more influential than others at any given time in a college's development. Misunderstandings and tensions arise because these differing philosophies are often held by different college staff. For example, counselling staff may have a 'welfare' ethic whereas admissions staff may have a 'marketing' approach. Bringing such differences out in the open for discussion is an important contribution to institutional self examination because they each have a valid contribution to make in the development of college guidelines or codes of practice for learner support services. Perhaps the healthiest institution is one which allows for the various approaches to co-exist to some extent. For instance, a vigorous marketing drive which generates increased enrolments may mean that more learners need support which, in turn, helps to reduce non-completion rates, thereby improving college performance.

3 THE LOCATION AND OWNERSHIP OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

The increase in the range and impact of learner support services has raised numerous organisational issues for colleges. Restructuring exercises have often enabled colleges to look again at the balance between 'central services' and 'decentralised services'. To some extent this has been a 'tidying-up' exercise in that the various cross-college posts which have emerged over the past five years are brought together to form single organisational units. It also represents the re-alignment of college structures to support the 'customer-centred/commercial orientation' culture of the 1990s.

A trend towards more centralised provision

The survey showed that while most colleges organised their learner services mainly as a range of separate services or through teaching departments, the use of centralised college units was becoming the most popular option.

SURVEY FINDING

About 40% of the survey colleges said that learner support services were organised mainly through a separate unit.

Commentary

The decision to opt for a centralised unit depends to a large extent on the size of the college and on the analysis of the functions of learner services. For example, bringing together all types of learner support might create a disproportionately large unit. One college which was being organised into nine departments decided to set up a Learning Services Department and a Student Services Department, both with major development roles. The two departments will bring together what is in many colleges a fragmented range of services as the table indicates.

Department of Learning Services	Department of Student Services
library and information services	educational guidance
computer services	personal counselling
reprographics and AVA services	careers advice
flexible learning facilities	social and cultural events
open learning facilities	health care
	learning skills
	nursery
	refectory
	shops
	accommodation

In another large college learning services and student services were combined with customer and staff services to make up a large College Services faculty. Under purposeful management there are obvious gains in terms of efficiency and impact to be made, especially from the point of view of the learner. Central units are usually highly visible and accessible, and rapidly develop team expertise which benefits learners.

However, there are also some disadvantages. Some teaching staff may come to regard student services as the college 'dustbin' where all non-classroom problems can be directed. Department managers could become resentful of the resources which such units attract. Hence, some colleges are considering moving away from 'top-slicing' funding towards internal service level funding arrangements. Under such arrangements some resources might be allocated on the basis of services delivered, such as a careers education programme, for instance.[2]

Regional feedback also indicates that some lecturing staff did not understand the role of their student services and regarded them as a non-essential service or an additional cost which they have to subsidise. Good internal marketing and high service standards are important in overcoming such hostile views.

Ad hoc learner support services

SURVEY FINDING

28% of the survey colleges organised learner support services as a range of separate services.

Commentary

Typically this approach involves the use of specialists such as counsellors, health care staff, careers advisers, etc. and thus the level of expertise available to learners was often high. However, while the quality of the service may be good it is not always readily available on a systematic basis. Specialists often felt unsure of their status and were sometimes isolated from the rest of the college.[3] Establishing working relationships with other services and teaching departments could also be difficult.

In some instances the specialists had different line managers within a college and this made co-ordination difficult. Other colleges, however, overcame this problem by co-ordinating the work of individual specialist services through a senior manager such as the vice principal.

Teacher-dependent services

SURVEY FINDING

About one in five of the survey colleges indicated that learner services were organised mainly through teaching departments.

Commentary

Traditionally this approach relied mainly on the use of college lecturers either to provide learner support (sometimes on remitted time) and perhaps supported by external or college-based specialist staff. The advantages of this approach lie in its directness and potential for strengthening lecturer/student links. Against this must be set the uneven nature of such support services, dependent as they are on the inclination, time or expertise of teaching staff and on departmental policy.

In some cases the introduction of Records of Achievement has strengthened this role and provided a new focus for the course team. Indeed one college felt that that the need for counselling services was greatly reduced as student reviews and improved tutorial support were picking up problems much earlier and finding solutions before matters reached crisis levels.

The use of external specialists

SURVEY FINDING

About eight per cent of the survey colleges used external specialists as the main providers of learner support services.

Commentary

While there is much to be gained by good management in using external specialists it was surprising that a number of colleges relied mainly on these sources. Using external specialists from the Careers Service, Citizens Advice Bureau and local social and health services is a useful and cost-effective way of providing a measure of learner support. This would be especially true for small colleges, particularly with regard to obtaining specialist staff such as tutors for aurally or visually impaired students. In some colleges, for example, regular monthly 'surgeries' were held by HIV or substance abuse advisers. Nevertheless it is hard to see how reliance on these sources alone could provide more than a basic range of services for a limited number of learners.

Conclusion - developing integrated services

The survey showed that most colleges in fact operated a mixed organisational model and this reflected the 'seamless robe' approach which many favoured. Although this approach has the advantage, in theory, of involving all staff it often suffers from an organisational weakness in that no one is responsible or accountable for the overall service. Hence the trend towards more centralised provision is likely to continue although the organisational mix will vary from college to college. The significant factor from the learner's point of view is the extent to which the services are coherent. Some colleges have developed models which seek to stay close to the learner and are based on the notion of the learner pathways through the college.[4] They aim to provide a range of linked services which support the learner from pre-entry to exit guidance and beyond into life-long learning, as the diagram indicates.

LEARNER ROUTES AND SUPPORT SERVICES

STAGES	PRE-ENTRY **(COMING FROM SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT, NON-EMPLOYMENT)**	ENTRY	DURING PROGRAMME	EXIT	POST EXIT **(GOING TO HE, EMPLOYMENT, SELF EMPLOYMENT RETURN TO FE)**
SERVICES	Marketing Publicity Information Liaison with schools, community and employers	Guidance-supported admission to help learners in choosing programmes Selecting options Identification of starting points IDA/APEL service to establish starting points Initial action planning Learning contracts Induction programme	Tutoring support Recording achievements Guidance and counselling services Learning support Assessment and accreditation services Work experience	Evaluation Progression Guidance Careers advice Transfer Docu-mentation Credit transfer	Careership Supporting lifelong learning Re-entry services

By focusing on students in this way support services can be organised to support individual student goals as well as corporate committments.[5]

4. STAFFING LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

The expansion of learner support services has changed the way many colleges think about their support staff and about the way lecturers use their time. In some colleges this has led to a significant increase in the ratio of 'support' staff to 'lecturing' staff. Many of these are new types of posts as the emerging and lively student service networks indicate and the recent formation of the National Association for Managers of Student Services is an indication of a growing professional awareness.

Assigning responsibilities for learner support services

SURVEY FINDING

Over 75% of colleges assigned specific responsibilities for learning services to both 'lecturing' and 'support' staff. Many of these seemed interchangeable.

Commentary

Although some colleges stoutly maintained that 'support' staff provided administrative support only the survey showed that many were responsible for carrying out the same tasks as lecturers. For example, the survey showed that 'support' staff were engaged in marketing, counselling, guidance work, careers education, equal opportunities co-ordination, admissions, referrals and student union work. These were all activities which 'lecturing' staff also carried out. The increased interface between support staff and learners is changing the traditional FE support staff arrangements which were based on the technician/clerical and administration distinction. This distinction is becoming less helpful and hybrid posts are appearing which offer much better career prospects for support staff. The trend is for these to replace 'lecturing' staff as colleges reduce 'remission' or 'abatement' levels.

Examples of these newer types of posts cited at regional conferences include the following:

Study adviser

Tasks:
- monitor progress and attendance of a caseload of 40 students per week
- develop action plans and co-ordinate Records of Achievement

Credit adviser

Tasks:
- gather and assess initial evidence from the assessment/ accreditation of prior learning (APL)
- provide clients with costs and top-up arrangements
- arrange for vocational specialists inputs

Student liaison workers

Tasks:
- liaison between the National Union of Students (NUS) and college
- organise personal interest activities programme
- develop extra-curricular activities

Assessment supervisor

Tasks:
- to supervise skills acquisition and organise assessment of competence

Shifts in the balance of teaching and non-teaching staff were raising tensions in some colleges and the acquisition of improved personnel management skills was regarded as an essential post-incorporation need.

The extent of learner support services staffing

Finding out how many staff were working in learner support services proved difficult. Some services were 'historical' and were taken for granted. Other services resided in departments and no one really had an overview of the total numbers involved. Some even questioned the wisdom of finding out in the belief that 'invisibility' meant security. Others, however, welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate commitment to learner support by including nearly all staff as contributing to staff support services.

SURVEY FINDING

Although many colleges intended to increase their staffing levels a considerable number had difficulty in establishing just how many staff were actually involved in providing learner support services.

Commentary

The uncertainty about the extent of learner support staffing which some colleges displayed was due to two main factors. Firstly, the range of learner support was not fully identified, so the level of learner support and the resources absorbed were not fully known. Secondly, there were different interpretations of learner support services varying from a fairly specific or narrow definition involving a small number of staff to the 'seamless robe' approach which included the entire college staff.

Consequently there was a very wide range in the numbers of staff considered to be involved in learner support services, particularly in the numbers of 'lecturing' staff involved. Obviously colleges with established central student service units found it easier to identify the extent of staffing levels than those with decentralised provision.

Conclusion

Many would accept that staff development for support staff has long been a neglected issue. Previous FEU work has noted that until recently teaching staff did not appear to perceive a significant role for non-teaching staff in supporting the curriculum. Equally non-teaching staff did not see a role for themselves in supporting learning.[6] However they did value training, especially training which related to their college work rather than a course which led only to qualifications.

With the emergence of a new cadre of education workers these issues become more urgent. In some cases there are appropriate recognised professional qualifications and standards, such as the various certificates and diplomas in Counselling Skills and the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) Standards for Assessors and Verifiers. The Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE, merged into FEU in April 1992) has also proposed the development of occupational standards for guidance workers linked to nationally recognised accreditation and qualifications.[7] The recently formed Lead Body for Advice, Guidance and Counselling now has the task of producing these standards. Preliminary work by the lead body has identified competence statements and performance criteria likely to be common to a wide range of practitioners and other professionals. The lead body is now engaged in development to produce national standards which could be suitable for the multi-skilled education support workers which are beginning to appear in the system.

The enhanced role of non-teaching staff in supporting learners also has implications for college lecturers. Apart from concerns about 'boundary' or 'demarcation' conflict, colleges commented on the need to prepare lecturers for new roles as managers of learning able to deploy a variety of learning strategies.

5 SUPPORTING THE LEARNER

For some colleges the difficulty of deciding how learner support services should be organised and staffed has been reduced by separating those services which support the **learner** from those which support **learning**. These arrangements and activities which provide personal support for **learners** are often described as student services and are mainly staffed by non-teaching staff

The range of learner support services

Colleges identified over 20 learner support activities and the survey finding below, lists the most significant of these.

SURVEY FINDING

Currently fully managed or co-ordinated centrally by learner support services (or equivalent)

Main Activities	% of Survey Colleges
Counselling/personal guidance	79%
Financial support/grants/Access funds	67%
Students Union work	57%
Accommodation support	52%
Overseas student support	45%
Creche/play groups	35%
Chaplaincy	28%
Special needs support	26%
Health/welfare	25%
Reception	23%
Marketing and publicity	22%
Canteens and refectory	8%

Commentary

There seems to be a consensus among colleges around a core of functions (such as counselling, students union work and accommodation support), that are basic student services. With regard to counselling however, many colleges asked for clarification on the distinction between advice, guidance and counselling. While all these activities can be included under the general heading of student/learner personnel work, a professional counselling service generally means a therapeutic/psychological approach to personal difficulties (including learning difficulties) which clients can request, usually from a recognised and qualified counsellor. According to this definition, guidance activity in most colleges is not counselling, although the tutor or guidance worker may

need counselling skills (e.g. the ability to listen, not be judgmental, etc.). There are different definitions of 'guidance', but it generally denotes a range of activities such as informing, advising, assessing, enabling, advocating and feeding back, designed to help learners make decisions and cope with transition.[8]

Confusion arises because some definitions include 'counselling' without distinguishing between professional counselling and allowing people to explore their thoughts and feelings about their situation. Some colleges have also adopted American models which place 'counsellors' within the academic team supporting individual progress.

Colleges also listed a range of marketing and threshold services, such as publicity, liaison work and reception services, which are less frequently organised by learner support services. Some found it useful to group these as customer or client services with main activities coalesced around potential or previous 'customers'. Once 'customers' were converted into learners, other support services became available depending on the mode of attendance. In general however full-time students were the main beneficiaries.

Changing priorities

Most of the survey colleges indicated their intention to expand their learner services and to increase the range and penetration of centrally provided services. The survey of college intentions gives some indication of changing priorities.

Commentary

When the additional intentions of the survey colleges which are planning to involve learner services **partly** in the management or co-ordination of support activities are taken into account, the top priorities appear to be improving reception facilities and overseas student support. The proposed certificate in international student services being developed by the UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs is another indication of growing interest in the latter activity. Interest in general welfare also appears to be increasing and particularly a concern to provide more flexible catering arrangements.

SURVEY FINDING

Will be fully managed or co-ordinated centrally by learner support services (or equivalent).

Main activities	**% of survey colleges**
Overseas student support	12%
Accommodation support	12%
Financial support and advice services	9%
Chaplaincy	9%
Students Union	8%
Marketing/publicity	5%
Reception services	5%
Special needs support	5%
Transport	4%
Health/welfare services	4%

Conclusion

Identifying functions which support the learner is helpful in deciding appropriate organisational and staffing requirements. It also opens up the possibility of bringing together different groups of support staff, such as administration and marketing or publicity, in synergetic partnership. Examples of administrative functions which have been closely linked to learner support services include enrolment and registration arrangements, student records, financial support and examination entries. Such alignments also help to consolidate the place of learner support services within colleges by identifying them with essential college functions.

Useful though this model, separating learner and learning services, is for analysing organisational and staffing requirements, it is essential to regard these services also as **part of an overall system which supports both the learner and learning process.** For example, pro-active marketing activity not only informs the learner about the college offer, it also enables the college to respond in a more informed way to the learning needs of the community it serves. Similarly, improvements in canteens, crèches and other 'welfare' facilities help to enhance the overall climate for learning. Growing professionalism in this area may yet lead to greater awareness of the learner's interaction with the college environment and a more sophisticated approach to site management.[9]

6 SUPPORTING LEARNING

Some colleges have begun to cluster a range of services around the theme of learning support. Others have established institutional responses to changes in the post-16 curriculum such as Records of Achievement or Core Skills development. These developments have brought an increase in the range of centrally provided curriculum services.

Supporting the curriculum

Colleges identified 25 curriculum activities which were organised or managed to some extent through learner (student) services, and the survey finding lists those occurring most frequently.

SURVEY FINDING

Currently fully managed or co-ordinated centrally through learner support services (or equivalent)

Main activities	% of survey colleges
Educational and vocational guidance	53%
Admissions arrangements	42%
Initial advice and assessment	31%
Tutorial arrangements	27%
Exit and progression arrangements	26%
Libraries and study centres	26%
Induction programmes	24%
Records of achievement	22%
Health education	21%
Examination entries	17%
Recreational and cultural activities	16%
APL	14%
Action planning	14%
Work experience placements	12%

Commentary

The survey indicated that the extent of the involvement of learner (student) services in supporting the curriculum varies widely ranging from almost zero to a fairly significant and influential role. In some areas such as admissions and guidance, there is a degree of consensus about the role of central services. There appears to be a general acceptance, for instance, to regard joining a course as a key curriculum decision which should be supported by information and advice. In other areas, particularly those with some 'teaching' input, there was often an element of controversy. One head of student services noted a strong 'hands-off' message from fellow heads of department when it came to curriculum matters. Other colleges faced much less resistance in using their learner (support) services units or staff to co-ordinate aspects of the curriculum, such as

ROAs or even to deliver some elements of a course such as induction or careers education. Such differences reflect the different histories and developments of colleges as well as the perspectives of curriculum managers on which aspects of the curriculum can or should be delivered on a college-wide basis or by teaching departments.

Deciding on the best clustering or juxtaposition of services also raises important issues. For instance, some colleges with central admissions and guidance units see schools liaison, marketing and publicity as a natural extension of the work of such units. The question here is how can a marketing function fit easily with an impartial guidance role. Protection of the ethics of guidance services may require that the marketing function is kept separate and distinct.

Many colleges are also finding that learning support services do not organise easily into general provision. This is partly due to differences in tradition. A typical learning support team includes English-as-a-second-or-other-language (ESOL) organisers, special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators and teachers of students with impaired vision or hearing. Their values and teaching styles will often be different to other teaching staff. There are also organisational difficulties because of the many points of cross over between central learning support and other college provision, such as adult basic education units, SEN support, learning centres or workshops and the various course programme areas. Avoiding duplication and providing supportive but cost-effective systems are elusive objectives.

Supporting Learning (FEU, 1992) sets out a model for a college-wide approach based on the philosophy of inclusiveness. It details the essential elements for supporting learning and a range of variants necessary to support general and specific needs.

Developing support for the curriculum

Many colleges indicated their intention to extend the scope of curriculum activities organised through learner support services.

SURVEY FINDING

Will be fully managed or co-ordinated centrally by learner support services (or equivalent).

Curriculum activity	% of survey colleges
Initial advice and assessment	24%
APL	13%
Educational and vocational guidance	13%
Records of achievement	12%
Careers guidance/education	9%
Exit and progression arrangements	9%
Action planning	8%
Core skills	8%
Libraries and study centres	8%
Induction programmes	6%
Examination entries	5%
Health education	5%
Recreational and cultural activities	4%

Commentary

The survey of college intentions shows that improvement in 'threshold' services such as initial advice and assessment, including APL, topped the agenda. Exit services, often neglected for part-time students particularly, were also high on the list of priorities. Apart from the obvious benefits of efficient procedures for administering the return of books and equipment, one college noted that there was much to be gained by organising 'a caring goodbye'.

Dealing with learning records and other forms of documentation, from individual action planning to examination entries, emerged as another set of activities which lent themselves to central co-ordination and management.

A number of colleges were also looking at 'common core' aspects of the curriculum which would be delivered as part of an overall college offer using RBL methods. Hence the growing interest in organising learning resources through a central unit. In fact some colleges found it useful to separate, in organisational terms, learning resources from learning support. Typically learning support has been aimed at those with learning difficulties but some colleges now see the need to establish learning support for high ability students, including training in research techniques, higher-level mathematics and foreign languages.

Colleges have also found it helpful to define or clarify what they mean by learning support. Definitions need not be complex or complicated. One useful definition describes learning support as the 'additional support required by individual students to fulfil their maximum potential on a programme or course of study'. Such support might be needed before, during or on exit from a learning programme.

Learning resources can be described as those services, facilities and materials which are required to support individual students to achieve their stated learning aims. Increasingly the trend is to bring together library, audio visual aids, IT and flexible learning workshops as a single college unit or department.

Conclusion

Managing the interface between centrally provided curriculum support services and the main teaching departments is a delicate task. Understandable tensions and misunderstandings can arise due to conflict between apparently rational departmental goals and collegiate purposes. For example, where a department may see student development mainly in terms of academic achievement or skills acquisition, collegiate curriculum involvement might be directed at social and cultural growth or developing personal autonomy and effectiveness. In some colleges these differences have become highly political especially where resources are declining and one college noted that such differences amounted to a 'profound cultural dissonance'. Obtaining a wide measure of staff support for major corporate developments is an important task for college management and well worth the investment in time and energy.

7 THE QUALITY OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

The expansion of learner support services has highlighted the need to develop suitable service standards and FEU is currently preparing notes for guidance on service quality measures, standards and performance.[10] Many colleges are aware of this and already use a variety of means to assess the quality of their support services. Generally, however, reliable measures for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the range of learner support services are not available although progress has been made in some areas.

Limited use of existing monitoring, review and evaluation arrangements

SURVEY FINDING

Only about 20% of the survey colleges stated that they applied their existing MRE systems to learner support services and 25% of the survey colleges reported that they used performance indicators.

Commentary

The infrequent use of college MRE systems for reporting on learner support services was due to the fact that these systems are either course based or were designed originally for WRFE monitoring and review. Generally it seems that learner support services lie outside the main established quality procedures and activities. There are indications, however, that this may change as a number of colleges were aiming to develop their MRE arrangements within Total Quality Management (TQM) frameworks. One college reported that it was applying BS5750 to its student services unit. Another stated that its student services would be monitored by the quality assurance manager and marketing officer.

Although a number of colleges had successfully developed performance indicators, particularly, dealing with enquiries and admissions, there were reservations about the efficacy of 'hard indicators'. For instance, an increase in the numbers using college counselling or health care services might indicate that these services were more accessible or responsive; it might also be an indicator of growing anxieties or influenza epidemic! Nevertheless colleges did show great interest in the development of performance indicators and some useful examples were cited. These included 'turn-around' guarantee times at each stage of an admissions process — one college aimed for a five-day turn-around between initial APL and an interview with a vocational specialist. Other examples were waiting list reductions or enquiry: enrolment ratios. The establishment of policy statements, service definition and targets is an essential prerequisite for devising performance indicators as the example below indicates.

Illustrative example:

College careers advisory service.

Extract from Policy Statement

In line with the College's policy of encouraging independence and personal autonomy, the Careers Advisory Service will provide opportunities for all students to develop the self awareness and skills to facilitate further transition to study, employment or career enhancement.

Service definitions

The college careers advisory service, working with the teaching departments, will offer:

- individual careers guidance interviews;
- programmes of careers education;
- information on employers, professions, courses and opportunities for further study;
- practical help through the preparation of applications and curriculum vitaes and opportunities for interview practice;
- vacancy information service and facilities for employers to interview students on campus.

Performance targets

- increased take-up by adults on part-time courses;
- increased use of RBL methods;
- encourage use of databases such as ECCTIS and MARISNET;
- target specific groups for interview practice;
- increase numbers of employers involved in specific SOC areas.

Such an approach makes it much easier to devise relevant performance indicators. In addition, national standards and indicators for the Careers Service as a whole are being prepared by the Employment Department's Careers Service Branch and should be helpful to colleges.

Policy statements for learner support services are also helpful in establishing or 'firming up' the so called soft indicators which many would argue are the important indicators in the long term. Examples of these are the confidentiality of counselling; the equity of admissions arrangements (as indicated by enrolment profiles); secure record keeping or the impartiality of guidance (as indicated by the number of referrals to other providers). Making statements about the ethics and values of various types of learner service can be an important contribution to improving their quality, especially if followed up by management checks and audits.

Extensive use of formal reports and routine statistical surveys

SURVEY FINDING

Three quarters of the colleges produced formal reports on aspects of their learner services for governors/academic board, etc. Two thirds of the colleges also carried out routine statistical surveys.

Commentary

Reports and statistical surveys played a major role in providing managers with information both to protect existing resources and to justify a particular development need. These also provide managers with basic reassurances about staff utilisation; necessary, given that many student service activities lie between traditional routine college administration tasks and time-tabled teaching duties. Many colleges, therefore, produced comprehensive annual reports containing detailed statistical surveys, particularly of the activities of careers, counselling and health care staff (see below):

Extract from Central Student Service Annual College Counselling Returns

Total number of clients	759
Number of students clients	704
Number of staff clients	33
Number of overseas clients	22
Number of interviews	1855
Number of hours involved	1846
Approximate age of student clients	
Under 21	253
21-25 years	285
Over 25 years	188
Main types of problem	
Financial	82
Course	42
Personal	605
Career	11

Such information provides valuable insights into the services provided and highlights areas which may call for some sort of intervention. One college counselling service, for instance, noted that female clients accounted for over 70% of its 2,000 users. Although its three part-time counsellors were women the college felt that the real problem might lie within the departments. Was there a 'stiff upper lip' mentality in the mainly male teaching departments or was it that some staff did not know about or understand the service? The same college, found to its surprise, that a large number of staff used the counselling service.

Statistical surveys of this kind are also useful in indicating to college managers and other staff the extent of the services provided. For example in one large college a detailed statistical report of the work of the college health service recorded an impressive 2,564 visits. The table below shows an analysis of visit type.

College health service: main visit types

Medical	1594
Occupational injury	308
Non-occupational injury	409
Re-visits	289
Re-dressing	275
Others (pre-course health) screening, VDU eye tests)	509

However, there is a need to provide a focus for statistical surveys otherwise they may lack direction or fail to provide information for quality management.

Widespread attempts to obtain the views of clients and staff

SURVEY FINDING

About 70% of the survey colleges stated that they used the views of clients to monitor and evaluate their learner support services; two thirds of the colleges also sought the views of the college staff.

Commentary

User satisfaction is generally held to be the most significant indicator of the quality of a service.[11] It is the core principle of most TQM programmes, for instance, and most colleges seem to be increasing their use of client surveys. Such surveys often served a dual purpose both as an internal marketing device and as a means of establishing levels of satisfaction. However, monitoring was rarely carried out on the basis of client satisfaction, although it was sometimes identified as a development area. Colleges had difficulties in defining quality characteristics and then setting standards. In this way FE reflects the general situation in Britain. A recent survey shows that most firms are only now considering quality definitions and measures for their businesses and that there was little systematic consideration of customer-based standards.[12]

Obtaining the views of other college staff was important since they were internal 'clients' of learner support services and also were often suppliers of AVA, library or RBL services. One college principal also suggested that this should be part of an overall strategy to make staff more aware of learner services. Some teaching staff were hostile to what was perceived as 'interference' by learner services; others to what they considered a diversion of resources away from the real business of the college (i.e. teaching). So it was important to obtain shared understanding of the nature of a client-based institution.

Conclusion

Many colleges are working to introduce suitable quality systems for their learner support services. One college, for example, has started a Guidance and Counselling project which has developed standards covering four phases of a student's experience:[13]

- Pre course
- Enrolment and induction
- In course
- At exit

Another group of colleges had begun to develop quality criteria for learning support, personal support and information services.[14] Local models, especially those which engage with customers in devising standards, have an immediacy and relevance which national standards may lack.

There is also evidence of much self-help activity at practitioner level as the growth of student services networks indicates. Quality-related questions such as 'How can we obtain meaningful student evaluation of college provision?' or 'How can we improve careers education and guidance in FE?' abound at such meetings.

However, defining service standards and performance indicators is not easy. Resource constraints and 'value-for-money' issues need to be taken into account.[15] What was the added value of expanding learner support and what was its opportunity cost? Such issues become especially important where colleges are planning to increase top-slicing ratios or to introduce 'service standard agreements' as part of internal budget delegation.

8 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES AND THE QUALITY OF COLLEGE PROVISION

There are two main questions here. Firstly, is the existence of well organised and resourced learner support services, *per se*, a necessary pre-condition for a quality FE service? Secondly, to what extent can these services be organised to support the overall quality of college provision?

Feedback from colleges indicated that learner support services already provided a valuable input into the drive for quality but there was still much to be done. By focusing on the wider needs of students especially, the overall quality of the college could be improved so this cross-college approach was worth exploiting further. To paraphrase one college – in the next decade FE colleges would be judged not only by course outcomes but also by the quality of services provided.

Management information systems and learner support services

SURVEY FINDING

Under 50% of the survey colleges used their learner support services to provide data for MIS.

Commentary

It would appear that the potential of learner services to provide data for MIS is under-utilised at present. To some extent this may be a development lag because a number of colleges were introducing computerised MIS networks and a more user-friendly approach which would encourage staff involvement and self-help attitudes. One college renamed its MIS the College Information System to indicate that much valuable information was available to staff and also to motivate them to provide accurate up-to-date information. Obviously those colleges which have established centralised admissions and information services have access to a large volume of information, particularly on enquiry profiles. One college has established a Guidance Point with a computerised logging system capable of tracking a client contact from initial enquiry onwards. Another used enquiry pattern analysis to provide early warning of low interest from particular regions or schools. Such systems will become increasingly important with the use of learner-led funding systems such as Training Credits.

Providing a focus for client satisfaction, feedback and advocacy

SURVEY FINDING

Over 70% of the survey colleges stated that their learner support services acted as a focus for customer feedback and played an advocacy role on behalf of learners.

Commentary

Because of the nature of their activities learner support services provide a natural focus for client surveys and complaints collection systems. Also, through their increasing involvement in ROA and various other ongoing types of guidance, counselling and learner support, much information hitherto hidden from college managers, can be made available. However, unless carefully handled this could create internal tensions and one college warned against using student services to monitor teaching departments for instance. The key point being that such surveys should be used to assess the processes designed to deliver services — not as a covert means for assessing other people in the organisation.

Prompt and effective complaints resolution is a key indicator of commitment to customer satisfaction but the survey did not indicate the extent to which colleges fed such information back into the system for planning purposes. Again the issue of developing standards was raised and it is probably true to say that most colleges were at the stage where customer satisfaction programmes were essentially reactive.

A useful start in developing standards for feedback has been developed by UDACE in its *Quality Framework for Educational Guidance*.[16] This defines a quality standard for feedback activities as ongoing structured feedback to providers, funders and controllers of education and training in order to bring about change to meet the requirements of user groups. Measurement of the standard would include reporting systems, records of feedback activity and details of identifiable change in provision, structures, systems, etc.

The advocacy role of learner support services seems to be extending increasingly into curriculum matters. A number of colleges organised their tutorial/study adviser support through learner services and saw this as a way of promoting entitlement. One college saw the advocacy role as supporting students who were not gaining from the present provision. This might involve supporting individual action plans in particular, with numeracy and literacy. Another college had three student liaison officers attached to their student services to provide feedback and an early warning system on problems or difficulties.

Again the UDACE framework provides an appropriate quality standard for empowering learners to achieve their objectives. Measurements of the standard would involve providing evidence of the representation of clients interests (e.g. negotiation with awards panel or funding body) and of the outcomes of advocacy activity (e.g. award of grant, study support improved, barrier to access removed). The UDACE framework also provides quality standards for other guidance-related activities such as information systems, confidentiality and impartiality.

Supporting the quality of provision

SURVEY FINDING

About 40% of colleges used their learner support services for control and assurance purposes to support the quality of provision

Commentary

It seems that colleges generally regard quality units or quality managers as independent, free from vested interests of any particular department. Nevertheless some colleges also recognised the potential of their learner services to support their quality systems. Monitoring equal opportunities policies was frequently cited as an example. One college operated its grievance procedures through student services; another checked progression using a tracking system designed to prevent drop out and improve success rates. Such activities would become crucial under funding regimes based on learning programme activities or outcomes.

External influences, such as the Citizens Charter, had also had an effect on colleges' thinking, particularly about the need to develop standards. Where work had begun on these standards it was possible to make a reasonably good fit with some Citizens Charter aims. The best practice is to use Charters as starting points only and supplement them with published statements as the extract below illustrates. Colleges which have begun this work will be well placed to respond to the FE Charter.

Citizens Charter statement	**Extract from a college's quality statement**
Publication of the standards that the customer can reasonably expect, and of performance against standards.	<u>Guidance and initial assessment services</u> As prospective learners you are entitled to expect: — access to informed advice; — unbiased guidance and initial assessment; — alternatives to any stated entry requirement — participation in joint assessment of the suitability of the course for which you are applying. *Standards* * Advice and guidance should clarify your aspirations and needs; * Relate these to opportunities in the wider spheres of education/ training/employment.
Organisations should set up and display targets for key areas of performance which the citizen understands and publish information regularly against those targets.	

	* Accredit prior learning where possible; Set out alternatives if the college programme cannot meet your requirements.
	Information services
Clear information about the range of services provided in plain language.	Clients to receive clear, accurate information, appropriately presented, about the college and its courses.
	Standards
Organisations should provide individual users as a matter of course, and in a form that they understand, with all the information that they need to be able to use the services available to them.	Admissions staff will have accurate information about the college: — aims and objectives — course content — teaching/learning styles — assessment/accreditation methods — timetable arrangements — learning resources — course outcomes and opportunities for progression — admission requirements — course fees and other payments — how to apply — current availability of places

Conclusion

In general, colleges recognise the potential of learner support services for enhancing the overall quality of the college offer although developing a full range of service standards is still some way off. Much could be gained by creating effective links between the work of support services and the college purpose or mission statement. For example, a college which has a mission statement regarding equity, access or flexible provision could require its learner services to provide evidence of support for this aim. Similarly a college which had a strategic planning objective to increase RBL facilities might audit its learning support services from this perspective.[17] Relating the quality of learner support services to corporate goals in this way provides a sound basis for establishing a positive system of accountability.

9 POSTSCRIPT

The search for suitable organisational structures

As the 'invisible empire' of student services emerges to centre stage in many colleges, the search for suitable organisational frameworks, for what were often quite distinct and unco-ordinated activities, continues to pre-occupy many colleges. Based on the findings of this project to date, the most useful approach seems to be based on an analysis of non-teaching activities in terms of a combination of corporate, customer and learner services. This enables support functions to be grouped or thought of in a more logical way so that the overall quality of the learning environment can be improved. This goal should help to bridge the teaching/non-teaching 'divide'.

A TAXONOMY OF COLLEGE SERVICES

CORPORATE SERVICES	CUSTOMER SERVICES		LEARNER SERVICES	
	Internally focused services (mainly for existing customers)	**Externally focused services (mainly for potential or previous customers**	**Learning support**	**Learning resources**
Personnel management	Counselling services Crèche/playgroup Refectory facilities	Marketing Needs analysis Outreach activities	Guided admissions service Induction	Library services Audio-visual aids Computer networks
Financial management	Health/welfare services	Publicity/exhibitions/ open days		College bookshop Learning centres
Estate management	Recreational facilities Overseas student care Accommodation support	Liaison with schools, parents, employers and community groups	Initial assessment APL Assessment and accreditation	Study centres Open learning facilities
Legal services		Information services	Work-based assessment	IT facilities
Computer services	Financial support Access funds Placements service	Enquiry bureau Reception services Enrolment advice	Examination entries Recording achievement Action planning Progress reviews	Career database Inter-active video Communications technology (satellite TV, cable TV, college radio)
Statistics services				
External affairs	Internal environment management	After-sales service Examination results service	Tutorial support	Learning packages
Campus ecology	Site supervision (security, car parks)	Destination analysis	Core skills support Careers education ESOL RBL support Study skills	
			Exit guidance Progression counselling Transfer documentation	

IMPROVING THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO ACHIEVE HIGHER PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT LEVELS

Specification of learning programmes

Because most courses are specified in terms of taught hours there is a constant struggle to find 'time' for many aspects of learner support. This has harmful implications for learners, colleges and national policy making.

For learners, particularly part-timers, this limited specification means the taught programme is all they get since that is 'all they paid for'. For the institution it means that even when an agreed range of services is made available to students the funding of these remains a constant problem because they are not seen as part of the course. Finally, at national policy-making level this lack of recording of what actually takes place in colleges means that the 'actual student load' is not known.

It would be helpful therefore to specify the different elements of a learning programme to include the various support aspects as indicated in the illustrative learning programme below:

ILLUSTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PROGRAMME

← LEARNING PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION →

ENTRY PROCESS	ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION SERVICES	TAUGHT PROGRAMME	INDEPENDENT LEARNING	INDIVIDUAL LEARNING SUPPORT	EXIT PROCESS
Information services Guided admissions Initial action planning Induction programme	Initial diagnostic assessment Entry testing APE(L) RoA Skill testing Assessing competences Examination entries	Class contact time teaching demonstrations supervised workshop activity	Open Learning workshops Libraries Learning centres IT networks and other RBL facilities	Tutorial services Progress reviews Vocational guidance Study skills Careers advice	Reports CVs References Transfer documents Progression arrangements Placement services

Some colleges have already done a considerable amount of work, particularly as a basis for achievement-led resourcing.[16] Future funding regimes might also encourage improved specification of learning processes.[17]

LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES AND CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT (RP746)

In response to the development needs indicated by colleges FEU will be preparing some more specialised reports on learning support services during 1993. Illustrative examples of linked learner support services and curriculum development will be prepared with particular reference to the following four areas:

- developing college-wide learning support services to improve achievement;
- installing guidance and information services which support lifelong learning;
- support services for resource-based learning;
- the role of library and associated information services in providing learning support.

We are anxious to encourage colleges to tell us about issues or developments regarding any of the above or about other aspects of learner support which interest them.

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FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

The objects for which the Further Education Unit (FEU) is established, are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of, experimentation in, and the development of further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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